



House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State for International Development
22 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2EG

20 January 2016
Ref: **ZA0069**

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you again for your comprehensive statement in response to my Urgent Question on Madaya and other besieged communities in Syria.

The UK should rightly be proud of its record as the second largest bilateral donor to the UN Syria appeal, and for our critical role in negotiating Security Council resolutions which authorise UN agencies to deliver aid across conflict lines and to break sieges.

There are, however, several points I would like to raise following your comments to the House.

Firstly, as you will be aware UN Security Council Resolution 2165 - renewed in 2191 and now 2258 - clearly states that aid should be delivered through the most direct routes "*with notification to the Syrian authorities*".

Whilst, of course, safety assessments and access negotiation should be carried out do you agree that it would be sufficient for UN agencies to notify the Syrian authorities of deliveries rather than seek official permission as is currently being requested from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for every aid delivery?

Secondly, *Siege Watch*, who put the number of Syrians under siege at 1 million, and Doctors Without Borders, who put the figure closer to two million, both report that the number of Syrians under siege are far higher than OCHA is reporting.

In your statement you said those in Madaya "represent just 10% of people in besieged areas". However, as I am sure you are aware, in the latest Secretary General report to the Security Council in December, Madaya was not classified as besieged and according to staff within OCHA it is still classified as 'hard to reach'.

What response have you had from OCHA to clarify why their numbers are far lower than those of other organisations and why places where the UN itself is reporting death by

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starvation, such as Madaya, are not currently classified as sieges?

Thirdly, the December report to the Security Council from OCHA is vague on which parties blocked access to those aid deliveries that were unsuccessful.

As we both know, it is the Assad regime that is denying the majority of aid deliveries to those in besieged areas - including within the Isis siege of Deir Ezzor where there is an airport that could be used to airlift in aid.

However, the current OCHA reporting makes this extremely unclear. The UN would surely not be compromising its impartiality by plainly reporting which groups are denying access to the deliveries that the Security Council has given it authorisation to implement. This would permit the UK and others to use this information to help pressure allies of the Assad regime, such as Russia and Iran, for greater access.

And finally, I read with interest the comments from Stephen O'Brien this week that, "all options be considered as we must find a way to break this impasse," and wondered whether your position on airdrops has changed? I recognise that this should be a last resort but in the absence of sustained and regular access for the UN ground operation agree with OCHA that air drops should be on the table.

Thank you again I hope you will continue to push to make sure we are doing all we can to ensure starvation is not being used as a weapon of war.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Cox". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a small dot above the 'o' in "Cox".

Jo Cox MP